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FM USOFFICE PRISTINA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6346  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0781  
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
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UNCLAS PRISTINA 000631

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR DREW  
SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: PROTEST OVER VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS FIZZLES

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Only around 250-300 protesters showed up for a July 24 demonstration in Pristina called by Albin Kurti, the activist leader of the Self-Determination Movement (SDM), against participation by Kosovo government officials that same day in final status negotiations in Vienna with senior Serbian political leaders. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The Self-Determination Movement (SDM), led by ethnic Albanian activist Albin Kurti, organized a July 24 protest in downtown Pristina against the Kosovo status negotiation process. The crowd, which the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) estimated to have numbered only 250-300 people, was dominated by middle-aged men and dispersed after 90 minutes. KPS reported no incidents of violence.

¶3. (SBU) Kurti held a July 23 press conference announcing the protest, and beginning on July 21 SDM reportedly put up 8,000 posters and distributed 15,000 leaflets throughout Kosovo. Despite this, turnout was low. Participants did, however, include representatives from Kosovo war veteran's associations and (U.S. Executive-Order listed) Kosovo Assembly member Emrush Xhemajli's Popular Movement of Kosovo (LPK). (NOTE: Xhemajli's presence is the latest example of his deepening relationship with SDM. Police arrested Xhemajli along with Kurti and 50 supporters at the Merdare administrative boundary line with Serbia who were protesting Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's June 28 visit to Kosovo. END NOTE.)

¶4. (SBU) Speakers at the demonstration uniformly criticized Kosovo negotiating team members for going to Vienna to participate in talks on Kosovo's independence, which they said was "non-negotiable." Most of the speakers were from the fringes of Kosovo's political life -- little-known members of fringe groups or fringe members of established opposition political parties. Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) member Xhevat Bislimi said: "our population should listen to U.S. officials who have said that status will reflect the will of the majority." Kosovo Assembly member Xhemajli said the mandate to discuss independence is with the Kosovo Assembly or with the people through referendum. Kurti himself told the crowd that "Serbia is our enemy." Former political prisoner and head of the well-known Kosovo writers' union Adem Demaci said "we are ready to pay any price for

Kosovo's freedom." In a July 25 interview with a local newspaper, Kurti expressed disappointment in the low number who turned out and blamed Kosovo's politicians and their "manipulation" of local media. (NOTE: He was referring to negotiating team members Vetton Surroi, who owns the local daily "Koha Ditore," and Blerim Shala, who manages the daily "Zeri." Both papers are considered moderate. END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) COMMENT. Although timed to coincide with the most important day of the Kosovo status process to date, the Kosovar public did not turn out in great numbers at this, the culmination of all of Kurti's demonstrations around Kosovo in recent months. Those few that did were treated to the same worn-out message from war veterans and personalities from Kosovo's political fringe. Kurti's efforts have thus far gained more media attention than traction with the general public. Unfolding events will help determine if he remains a fringe actor, or garners greater support in the future. END COMMENT.

16. (U) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable for release in its entirety to U.N. Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari.  
KAIDANOW